

**LANGUAGE USE AND ATTITUDES OF THE BIDAYUH TEENAGERS  
IN KOTA SAMARAHAN-KUCHING DIVISION, SARAWAK**

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This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of  
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**PENGUNAAN BAHASA DAN SIKAP REMAJA BIDAYUH DI  
BAHAGIAN KOTA SAMARAHAN-KUCHING, SARAWAK**

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Projek ini merupakan salah satu keperluan untuk  
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## **Pengesahan Pelajar**

Saya mengakui bahawa Projek Tahun Akhir bertajuk  
**“Penggunaan dan Sikap Bahasa di kalangan Remaja Bidayuh di bahagian  
Kota Samarahan-Kuching, Sarawak”**  
ini adalah hasil kerja saya sendiri kecuali  
nukilan, petikan, huraian dan ringkasan yang  
tiap-tiap satunya telah saya nyatakan sumbernya.

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Tarikh serahan

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## Statement of Originality

The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled  
**“Language Use and Attitudes of the Bidayuh teenagers in Kota Samarahan-  
Kuching division, Sarawak”**

is to the best of the author’s knowledge that of the author except  
where due reference is made.

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## ABSTRACT

### LANGUAGE USE AND ATTITUDES OF THE BIDAYUH TEENAGERS IN KOTA-SAMARAHAN- KUCHING DIVISION, SARAWAK

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*The study looks at the phenomenon of language shift among the Bidayuh teenagers in Kota Samarahan-Kuching division. The study aimed at investigating the language use of the Bidayuh teenagers in three domains, specifically home, school and friendship and their attitudes towards their own ethnic language. The objectives are: (1) to find out the Bidayuh teenagers first and second language, (2) to investigate the Bidayuh teenagers language proficiency in their ethnic language versus other languages, (3) to identify the Bidayuh teenagers patterns of language use in three domains; home, school, and friendship, and (4) to find out the attitude of the Bidayuh teenagers towards their ethnic language in order to determine the possibilities of language shift. The participants involved in this study were 210 secondary schools students, who are Bidayuh aged between 13 to 17 years old. A survey research design was carried out using questionnaire as the instruments. The findings revealed that the language that the Bidayuh teenagers use in all three domains is the ethnic language itself including Bahasa Melayu, which shows the tendency of language shift in the ethnic language. The findings also revealed that majority of the Bidayuh teenagers are in favour towards their ethnic language. Besides that, the phenomenon of language shift was found slower within the target Bidayuh teenagers due to the geographical area that is rural-area, which means there is a potential for language maintenance for the ethnic language.*

## **ABSTRAK**

### **PENGUNAAN DAN SIKAP BAHASA DI KALANGAN REMAJA BIDAYUH DI BAHAGIAN KOTA SAMARAHAN-KUCHING, SARAWAK**

**Marienfelde Jebi**

Kajian ini bertujuan melihat fenomena peralihan bahasa di kalangan remaja Bidayuh di bahagian Kota-Samarahan-Kuching, Sarawak. Fokus kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat penggunaan Bahasa di kalangan remaja Bidayuh di tiga domain, iaitu di rumah, sekolah dan persahabatan. Selain itu, kajian ini juga menyiasat sikap dan pandangan remaja Bidayuh terhadap bahasa etnik mereka sendiri. Objektif kajian ini adalah: (1) untuk mengenal pasti bahasa pertama (L1) dan bahasa kedua (L2) remaja Bidayuh, (2) untuk menyiasat tahap kefasihan remaja Bidayuh dalam bahasa Bidayuh serta bahasa-bahasa lain, (3) untuk mengenal pasti corak penggunaan bahasa remaja Bidayuh di tiga domain; rumah, sekolah dan persahabatan, (4) untuk melihat sikap remaja Bidayuh terhadap bahasa Bidayuh bagi mengenal pasti tahap fenomena peralihan bahasa. Sejumlah 210 orang pelajar sekolah menengah, berbangsa Bidayuh dan berumur 13 hingga 17 tahun terlibat dalam kajian ini. Data diperolehi dari kajian ini mendapati kebanyakan remaja Bidayuh menggunakan bahasa etnik mereka sendiri dan juga Bahasa Melayu di ketiga-tiga domain. Data diperolehi juga mendapati bahawa sikap remaja Bidayuh terhadap bahasa etnik mereka sendiri adalah positif. Di samping itu, kajian ini mendapati bahawa fenomena peralihan bahasa di kalangan remaja Bidayuh adalah perlahan yang mungkin disebabkan oleh faktor geografi, di mana remaja Bidayuh yang terlibat di dalam kajian ini kebanyakannya tinggal di kawasan pedalaman. Keadaan ini menunjukkan bahasa etnik, Bidayuh adalah berpotensi untuk dielihara dalam jangka masa panjang.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Chapter Overview**

The purpose of this chapter is to presents the introductory contents of the study, which begins with the background of the study that discusses on the broad field of the research problem and into the details of recent situation, happens among the Bidayuh teenagers in Kota Samarahan-Kuching division. Then, it is followed by describing the statement of problems, objectives of the study, and the research questions. Next, the significance of the study is explained and the operational definitions are discussed as well as the explanations of the scope of the study. This chapter ends with chapter review to summarise all that is discussed.

#### **1.1 Background of the study**

Malaysia is a multilingual community, where the society makes language choices every day in their lives. The choice of language use may differ depending on the setting of the interaction takes place. For instance, the choice of language use can differ between home setting and during official activities. It is assumed that at home, the choice of language is the vernacular or ethnic language of the community and on the contrary, the choice of language during official activities

is the official or national language. A study done on language use and attitudes in Catalonia on 309 university students, where majority use Catalan as their first language (L1), 23% Spanish and 13% are bilingual using both Catalan and Spanish proved that 70% of the students use Catalan in the family domain (Huguet in Lasagabaster & Huguet, 2007, p. 28). However, there were also several studies found that this trend has changed with the shift towards other languages.

It is proved in one study of language use and attitudes in Galicia of 207 university students, where Spanish is used mostly in family domain rather as opposed to Galician even though majority of the students mother tongue is Galician (37.7%) and the rest is Spanish (26.5%) and bilingual (33.8%) (Gutierrez, Salgado, Fernandez, Berg in Lasagabaster & Huguet, 2007, p. 51).

Sarawak, one of the many countries in Malaysia has vast ethnic groups. Sarawak consists of 27 ethnic groups, with the population estimated at 2, 404, 200 in year 2007. The largest ethnic group is Iban, which consists of 29% of the population. This is followed by followed by Chinese (26%), Malay (22%), Bidayuh (8%), Melanau (6%) and the rest of (9%) are other minority ethnic groups such as Orang Ulu, and Penan (Sarawak, Department of Statistics, 2007).

As Sarawak is a multilingual society, there is a need for each individual regardless of their own ethnic group to make themselves to be understood while communicating (Kendon in Marti, Ortega, Idiazabal, Barrena, Juaristi, Junyent, Uranga & Amorrortu, 2005). Therefore, Malay and English play important roles as the lingua franca especially in an inter group communication (Omar, as cited in Smith, 2003).

For this study, the focus is the Bidayuh, also known as “Land Dayak,” which is the fourth largest ethnic group in Sarawak. Before 1970s, there are three main groups, which are the Bukar-Sadong, Biatah, and Jagoi-Singai. Due to political reasons, the Selako-Lara is included as one of the Bidayuh ethnic groups. These four ethnic groups differ in terms of talking style and indistinct pronunciation.

However, they are able to understand each other and some can even speak in more than one Bidayuh language although they might not be able to follow the pronunciation exactly. This however does not include Selako-Lara group as their dialect contains many Malay words (Chang, 2002).

Specifically, this study looks at the Bidayuh teenagers' language use and attitudes. Teenagers are chosen for this study as they are identified as part of the younger generation that are exposed to various factors such as school, media, the dominant culture and emigration to urban areas that might lead to indifference attitude or rejection towards the local language (Marti, Ortega, Idiazabal, Barrena, Juaristi, Junyent, Uranga & Amorrortu, 2005).

This shows that, the younger generation tend to choose not to use their own language compared to the language of a higher status in their daily life. A study done in Malta on language Attitudes of the younger generation by Micheli (2001) revealed that the younger generation prefer to use English, which is viewed as language of prestige rather than Maltese, viewed as language of solidarity. Another study done among the Hmong in Marced, California also revealed that the younger generation are more proficient in English as they use it often in their daily life instead of their own ethnic language (Withers, 2004). Besides that, study done in American Samoa also indicates that the younger generation prefer to use English more than Samoan in their mode of communication (Broekhuizen, 2000).

In addition, the implementation of Bahasa Melayu as the national language and the increasing importance of education as well as the increasing demand for social interaction with other ethnic groups made the need for the Bidayuh community to learn other languages especially Bahasa Melayu and English. Both languages are particularly important as the lingua franca in an inter-group communication (Omar in Smith, 2003). This situation however may lead to the language shift phenomenon for the ethnic language.

A study that showed language shift happens in a minority group can be found in a study done by Mohamad Subakir Mohd Yasin (1998) on attitudes and identities of villagers in Sungai Lang. The study reported that there is a shift from Javanese to Malay language. In the study, a question was asked on the use of language in the family domain, where it is found that only a few of the villagers mentioned to use Javanese especially among the younger generation. In the community, the Javanese is viewed as the language of a lower-status, which is contrary to the viewed of a Malay language where it is viewed as better, more prestigious and valuable language. From the study, the shift of Javanese to Malay showed that there are three significant factors contribute to the phenomenon that is age, gender, and education.

Language shift is also happening in ethnic groups. It is evident in a study done on language shift among the Orang Miriek of Miri, Sarawak by Bibi Aminah Abdul Ghani and Abang Ahmad Ridzuan. In the study, there is a replacement of the once dominant language of the ethnic group, which is the Miriek language to Sarawak Malay. From the study, the older generation indicated that the younger generation are abandoning the Miriek language and beginning to use Sarawak Malay as their first language. In the home domain, the Miriek is no longer the dominant language especially among the younger generation. Although among the older generation, almost majority uses Miriek at home, yet the younger generation very often reply the elders in Malay. The study also found that less Miriek is used outside the home with high amount of the use of mix Malay and Miriek. It is also implied that Malay almost replacing Miriek among the younger generation in the communication outside the home domain. Moreover, the study found that Miriek is considered as lower status language, 'tribal' and 'primitive' compared to Malay (Martin, 1992, pp. 131-145).

In order to determine whether it is also applicable to the Bidayuh teenagers', there is a need to study their language use as well as their attitudes towards their own ethnic language, which are important to investigate language shift in Bidayuh ethnic groups. Thus, what language do the Bidayuh teenagers from each



ethnic group tend to use in their daily communication? And how do the Bidayuh teenagers perceived this ethnic language?

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

As it has been discussed earlier that studies have shown that teenagers has the tendencies to use other languages that are higher status than their own ethnic language, which indicates the phenomenon of language shift. This phenomenon has attracts many sociolinguists such as Fishman, Edward, Holmes and Wardhaugh (Mohamad Subakir Mohd Yasin, 1998). Most of the studies look at how social structure affects language attitudes, which affects language choice that may lead to abandonment of a particular language (Florey, Romaine & Trudgill in Mohamad Subakir Mohd Yasin, 1998). Batibo (2005) supports this by stated that the abandonment of a particular language, either willingly or under pressure, in favour or another to another language that takes over as a means of communication and socialisation leads to language shift.

Moreover, the frequencies of the language that the teenagers use as well as their attitudes towards their own ethnic language are the important aspects to look at as it can determine the status of the Bidayuh language. This can also help in explaining the current and future of Bidayuh language (Marti, Ortega, Idiazabal, Barrena, Juaristi, Junyent, Uranga & Amorrortu, 2005). Thus, this study will look at whether this situation is applicable or is also happening in the Bidayuh community among the teenagers.

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

The aimed of this study is to investigate the language use of the Bidayuh teenagers in three domains, specifically home, school and friendship and their attitudes towards their own ethnic language. Thus, this study aims to address the following objectives:

1. To find out the Bidayuh teenagers first (L1) and second language (L2)

2. To investigate the Bidayuh teenagers language proficiency in their ethnic language versus other languages
3. To identify the Bidayuh teenagers patterns of language use in three domains; home, school, and friendship
4. To find out the attitude of the Bidayuh teenagers towards their ethnic language in order to determine the possibilities of language shift

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between the first language (L1) and second language (L2) with the Bidayuh teenager's proficiency?
2. Is there a relationship between the language proficiency and the language used in the three domains?
3. Is there a relationship between the language attitude with:
  - a. Language proficiency?
  - b. Language used at home, school and friendship?

#### **1.5 Significance of the study**

The results of this study is hoped to be able to determine the Bidayuh teenagers language use and attitudes in three different domains, which are family, school and in friendship including the reason behind the teenagers' choice of language as well as their attitude towards their ethnic language. Once the language choice and attitudes of the Bidayuh teenagers are determined, the status as well as the future of the ethnic language could be acknowledged.

This study hoped to add the literature on language shift, especially where there is a shift to other language that is more dominant in the society, particularly Bahasa Melayu. The results hoped to identify whether the phenomenon of language shift is slower or faster in the community, especially in this study where the participants mostly lived in rural-area.

From this study, it can alert the Bidayuh community on the status of the ethnic language especially among the teenagers, where they are endangering the language, which may lead to its death.

The results of the study may be able to give awareness among the Bidayuh community especially the younger generations the importance to maintain the language by using the language in their daily life or other measures such as documentation and implementation of this ethnic language as one of the subjects in curriculum.

### **1.6 Scope of the study**

This study only focuses on three domains of language use, which are family, education and in friendship. Other domains such as religion, employment, or transactional are not covered in this study. Besides that, this study only looks at language use and attitudes and not other sociolinguistic aspects like code-switching, or code-mixing.

For this study, it focuses only on the Bidayuh teenagers and not in all generations. The teenagers chosen were secondary school students, aged between 13 to 17 years old, which means students from Form one to Form five. Three schools were used in this study. They are SMK Padawan, SMK Tun Abdul Razak, and SMK Siburan. The schools were selected after taking into considerations of the possible numbers of the Bidayuh teenagers. This means that, only schools with a large numbers of Bidayuh students were chosen. However, all the three schools are surrounds Biatah areas, which the majority of the students might be Biatah although there are also other Bidayuh ethnic groups due to factors such as intermarriages, or migration. Moreover, the schools selected were surrounds rural areas that means it does not cover urban areas.

## **1.7 Operational definition of terms**

The following terms are used in this study:

### **a) Domains of language use**

Domains was introduced by Fishman to describe institutional contexts, where one language variety are considered more appropriate than another based on the factors such as location, topic, and participants (Fasold, 1984). Fishman also used domains of language use to describe the concept of interaction between ‘typical participants in typical setting’. There are five domains, which are family, friendship, religion, education and employment (Holmes, 2001). Further indication by Platt and Weber (in Ting, 2006) in their studies added to another four domains. There are transaction, media, government, and law.

Bonvillain (1993) describes that domains are important in understanding the taxonomic patterns as well as making inferences on the speakers’ experiences of the world. This means that domains refer to a situation where interaction takes place that plays an important determinant of one language choice.

For this study, three domains are chosen, which are family, friendship and education, which places where taken most of the social interactions of the teenagers. For example, in a family domain, it involves the teenagers’ interaction with their mother, father, sister, and brother. In friendship, it involves interaction with their friends, and in education, it involves interaction with classmates and teachers.

### **b) Language choice**

Language choice is an act of having to choose appropriate language to be used depending on the social factors such as the context, participant, topic, and goal of the interaction (Bonvillain, 1993). It is a way of making choices in different types of linguistic variation that are used in expressing and reflecting social factors. It involves choosing dialects of a language or other different languages. Similarly to

Bonvillain, 1993, this choices are influence by factors such as who is being talked to, where, reasons and topic of discussion (Holmes, 2001). Ervin-Tripp (in Mohamad Subakir Mohd Yasin, 1998) also presented four main factors of language choice; First, setting and situation; second, the participants; third is the topic; fourth is the function of interaction.

In this study, language choice is determine by the patterns of language that the participants use during interactions in three domains.

#### c) Language attitude

Language attitude occur when a social group interacts with a second social group that posses different language, hence develops ideas about the other groups' language (Eastman as cited in Ting, 2003).

It is also are a formed of 'beliefs, representations and perceptions' on language that are influence by one's 'feeling of liking or rejection'. This will determine the possibilities of using the language, replace it completely or only in certain situations (Marti, Ortega, Idiazabal, Barrena, Juaristi, Junyent, Uranga & Amorrortu, 2005).

Therefore, it is important to look at the attitudes of the Bidayuh teenagers towards their own ethnic language, as there is a strong relationship between the language choices with one's attitude.

### **1.8 Chapter review**

In this chapter, social factors that determine the choice of language which are the domains of language use such as family, friendship, religion, and education, as well as the participants, topic and goal of the interaction has been discussed in the background of the study. Moreover, the reasons behind in bringing out this study has been explain in details in the statement of the problems. The following chapter will discuss in details all the literature reviews from existing theories as well as previous research findings that are crucial to support the framework of this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Chapter Preview**

This chapter is divided into eight sections, which presents some of the existing works in the field of language use and attitudes. The first section discusses on domains of language use, specifically family, education, and friendship. Next, language choice will be discuss and followed by discussion of other factors affecting language choice such as social distance, status, formality, and function of interaction. Then, language shift as well as factors contributing to language shift will be discussed. After that, it will be continued with the discussion on attitudes to language and descriptions of related studies will be explained. Finally, a summary and chapter review is elaborated.

#### **2.1 Domains of language use**

Social factors such as the person talking to, social context and topic of discussion are the three vital aspects in determining language choice during interactions in many different kinds of speech community. These three aspects are useful especially in looking at the typical interactions especially in a large community. For instance, in a typical home setting, the participants would involve family members such as parents and child and the typical topic can be family activities or

children learning. This typical interaction is known as domains of language use, which term used by Fishman to describe the concept of interaction between 'typical participants in typical setting'. Five domains that are commonly found in many communities are family, friendship, religion, education, and employment (Holmes, 2001, p. 21).

In addition, Fasold (as cited in Hohenthal, 2004) pointed out that Fishman introduces domain in order to describe the use of language in various institutional context in a multilingual society, which one language might be more appropriate in some specific contexts than another.

Domains are also 'attempt to summate the major clusters of interaction that occur in clusters of multilingual settings and involving clusters of interlocutors' (Fishman in Garcia, Peltz, Schiffman & Fishman, 2006). Domains also allow scholars to describe the relationship between the groups of interaction and interlocutors as well as with concrete social situations (Garcia, Peltz, Schiffman & Fishman, 2006).

Domains of language use is evident in a study done by Parasher on 350 educated people in two cities in India, which covers seven domains; family, friendship, neighborhood, transactions, education, government and employment (Fasold, 1984).

Besides that, it is also evident in a study done by Hannah Mweru Mugambi (n.d.) on language choice and shift in Kenya, utilized two domains, which are at home and at work.

## **2.2 Language choice**

As discussed earlier, domains of language use are derived from three important components of social factors, which are participants, setting, and topic. In relation to language choice, the three components play an important role in determining code choice. It is a way of making choices in order to choose appropriate language to be used depending on the social factors of context, participant, topic, and goal

of the interaction (Bonvillain, 2000, p. 335). Similarly, Holmes (2001, p. 23) explained that social factors who is being talked to, where, reasons and topic of discussion determine language choice.

Based on the three social factors mentioned, the norms of language use in a speech community can be identified. It can be a model to illustrate the domains and varieties that are relevant to language choice and to provide a clear basis to compare patterns of language choice in different speech communities (Holmes, 2001, p. 23).

### **2.3 Other social factors affecting language choice**

Besides domains of language use, there are other social factors that contribute to appropriate choice (Holmes, 2001, p. 25).

#### **2.3.1 Social distance**

The choice of language can be determined by factor like social distance or also known as solidarity. It is because a language can determine one's identity as well as distinguishing them with non-speakers (Batibo, 2005).

Social distance is based on the questions of "How well do they know each other?", "what is the social distance between the participants?", "Are they strangers, friends, brothers?" which affect the way one's talk. For someone that know each other well, and share the same attitudes and values or same ethnic tend to use their ethnic language during interaction. For instance, when two Paraguayans meet in Paris, they will use Guarani to show their shared identity (Holmes, 2001, p. 25).

#### **2.3.2 Status**

The status or power is one of the factors affecting language choice. It is determine by the social role in the society. For instance, the speakers at the top of the society normally use official language in the daily interaction, as they tend to have wider linguistic repertoire. The choice of language also occurs in the use of non-